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AN INTERNATIONAL LANGUAGE

THERE is a conflict between the political and scientific tendencies of the times and it will be curious to watch which influence prevails. In the political field nationalism is the order of the day. The war gave birth to a dozen new nations. International intercourse is hampered by tariff barriers, postal impediments and the revival of obsolescent languages.

But now comes the radio which knows no nationality and which may put a girdle round the earth seven times a second. It is impossible to partition the ether. Its waves spread impartially in all directions and anybody may listen in without the consent or knowledge of the sender. The Eiffel tower talks to people of thirty tongues. So long as intercommunication was confined to print, mail and telegraph, it was possible to get along with the aid of interpreters, but when millions are receiving messages without intermediaries they must have a common language. Whether this will be gradually and capriciously evolved out of the current commercial and maritime codes; whether the nations may set aside their mutual jealousy so far as to adopt one of the modern languages; whether Latin, the old international language, will be brought into use in its classical, ecclesiastical or a simplified form; or whether an artificial language, such as Esperanto or Ido, will find acceptance, remains to be seen. It is no longer an academic question, but has suddenly become of pressing practical importance. It should receive serious attention by competent philologists. It is of peculiar importance to the scientist who formerly could get along fairly well with a reading knowledge of English, French and German but who now must master not only Italian, Russian, Dutch and the Scandinavian languages, but also Polish, Czech, Japanese, Chinese, Irish and Hebrew if he wants to read

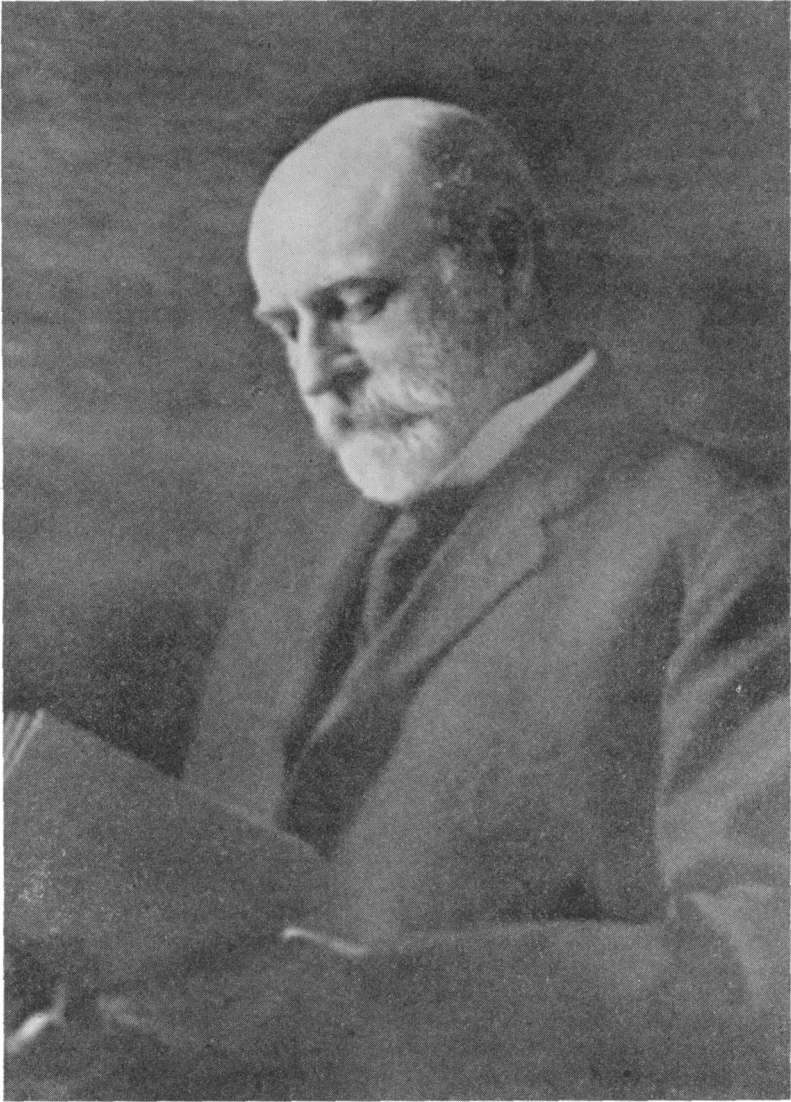
the reports of research in the original. Patriotic pride is strong in the newer nations and demands the publication of their scientific achievements in the vernacular. But the more powerful the impulse for the multiplication of languages and the wider the fields in which science is cultivated, the more necessary will become an international medium of communication.

The whole progress of civilization during the past century and a half has been toward making the world a smaller place to live in. Railroad, electric line, automobile, airplane and airship have all made transportation of concrete things easier and faster. The wire telegraph and telephone and the radio telegraph and telephone have taken information instantaneously to the whole world.

There is a missing link in this great time-contraction of the globe. The Japanese trans-Pacific radio operator can, in international code, tell the American operator that atmospheric disturbances are interfering with communication; they can hold a rather extended technical conversation in code. But difference in language prevents the simplest kind of exchange of ordinary information between many peoples of different countries, in spite of the fact that mechanical means of communication are highly developed.

International language will soon become an acknowledged world necessity. Like all the other great developments of modern times, it must first undergo development and scientific study. An international auxiliary language that will bring people of alien tongues together is not a remote possibility. If it existed to-day, if the generation that is growing up to-day were being taught an accepted international language, there is little question but that the next generation of the world would be able to easily "listen in" on radio broadcasting from any nation.

Pioneer work in the scientific con-



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sideration of the international auxiliary language problem is being done by the Committee on an International Auxiliary Language of the International Research Council, headed by Dr. F. G. Cottrell. Much progress is being made as those who attended the symposium on the subject at the Toronto meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science know.

INTERNATIONAL MEETINGS AT ROME

THE International Research Council, organized in 1919 at Brussels, will meet again in that city on July 18 of this year. Meanwhile the International Astronomical Union and the International Geodetic and Geophysical Union will meet at Rome on May 2. The United States will be represented at the astronomical meeting by Professor Frank Schlesinger, Yale University, chairman of the American delegates; Dr. R. G. Aitken, Lick Observatory; Dr. C. E. St. John and Professor F. H. Seares, Mount Wilson Observatory; Dr. H. D. Curtis, director of the Allegheny Observatory; Dr. O. J. Lee, Yerkes Observatory; Professor H. N. Russell, Princeton University; Professor John A. Miller, Swarthmore College; Professor Edward Kasner, Columbia University; Dr. Harlow Shapley, director of the Harvard College Observatory, and Dr. Frank B. Littell, of the U. S. Naval Observatory.

Dr. William Bowie, chief of the division of geodesy of the U. S. Coast and Geodetic Survey, will head the American delegation to the geodetic and geophysical meeting, and will be delegate to the section on geodesy. Other delegates are: Section on terrestrial magnetism, Dr. L. A. Bauer, director of the department of terrestrial magnetism of the Carnegie Institution of Washington; section of seismology, Professor H. F. Reid, of the Johns Hopkins University; section on meteorology, Dr. H. H. Kim-

ball, of the U. S. Weather Bureau; section on physical oceanography, Dr. G. W. Littlehales, of the hydrographic office of the Navy Department; section on volcanology, Dr. H. S. Washington, of the geophysical laboratory of the Carnegie Institution of Washington.

American astronomers met in Washington just before the American astronomical delegates left for Rome and considered many of the subjects that will come up for international consideration.

One of the questions on the agenda of the Rome meeting that will interest and affect the ordinary person most directly is the reform of the calendar. The American section did not instruct its delegates on this matter but it is expected that some action will be taken by the International Astronomical Union meeting. Much of the discussion by astronomers at Rome will relate to the unification of nomenclature and plans for international cooperation in various projects. A new system of spectrum classification of stars will be recommended by the American delegates, and plans for the determination of terrestrial longitude by wireless telegraphy will be laid. Another important question that will arise is the variation of latitude, or the "wabbling" of the earth. About twenty years ago, the Ukiah, Calif., Observatory was established as one of five latitude stations, and valuable data have been obtained. But the astronomers realize the need of further knowledge of the factors that affect the accuracy of their measurements and will urge additional stations.

Each one of the sections of the International Geodetic and Geophysical Unions has full agendas. The scientists of Europe will discuss the triangulation nets of many of their countries and Africa, as well as the establishment of a fundamental longitude net of the world. Euro-